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ABSTRACT

Prior to 1980, instructional support services were scattered in various divisions throughout Denver Auraria Community College (DACC), with little sense of mission and coordination. In 1980, the college developed a model for a coordinated instructional support division, based on the identification of the most important instructional and organizational elements of the division and the preparation of goals and objectives for each element. All existing remedial/developmental courses were grouped together; a basic skills assessment was correlated to appropriate curricula; the role of the Learning Development Center was divided into basic skills tutoring and other types of tutorial support; adjunct courses were developed that incorporated basic skills strategies into content courses; and faculty assistance efforts were initiated in the forms of staff development workshops, text readability scans, and in-class presentations for students on skill topics. The use of the model in division planning and review has greatly assisted in bringing together those scattered tutorial services, streamlined staff development efforts, enhanced in-service programs for content staff, stretched resources, and given each of the developmental programs the educational and funding status of belonging to a fully recognized and equally funded division. (HB)

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Developmental Studies as a College Division

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Those of us who are in the adult basic education profession, if only for a few years, could probably call to mind a variety of organizational approaches for providing our services. We have probably seen or read about several approaches for organizing, staffing and funding Learning Centers, peer tutoring and counseling programs, and credit and non-credit basic skills courses. We are aware of various methods of providing adjunct and content-specific study skills courses, of ways to organize support services for faculty, of different designs for testing services, especially for entry-level basic skills assessment. Each of us right now probably works in a setting which is at least somewhat different from that of our peers at this conference and could point to strengths and weaknesses of our own organization and delivery system rather easily. My experience has been, however, that few of us have ever been involved in a rigorous process which is necessary to analyze and evaluate the rationale and effectiveness of doing things the way we do. It is my purpose today to comment briefly on the advantages of the such a process -that of building a conceptual model - and then to describe a Developmental Studies division concept which was dervied from such a process.

It seems to me that a good place to start a discussion of the reasons for constructing conceptual models is the writing of W. Ross Ashby, an engineering and mathematics professor at Illinois. Ashby believes that any model is inherently as good as any other as long as we follow three important rules for its construction: 1) that the model builders establish what Ashby (1970) calls the "generating question" which provides the criteria for which variables to select; 2) that when variables are selected, we test them for relevance (for example, if X changes, does Y?); and 3) that we then find some relationship or pattern among the variables which has an isomorphic reflection in the "real world." Assuming that we could follow Ashby's advice and create

a model of what, for example, a college division should look like, why go to all the trouble in the first place? Even Ashby admits that the best of models are "inferior, a distortion, a lie" (p. 94). The only valid reason for constructing is convenience: it's easier and safer to test models of aircraft wings in wind tunnels or to create equations which represent traffic patterns before building highways. And it's probably even true that no model is inherently better than any other if convenience is its main reason for being; even Newton's mathematical formulae for describing planetary gravitation is widely used probably because pencils and paper are readily available and because his type of mathematics is widely understood.

But another group of authors, well represented by the philosopher Max Black, attributes to models the ability to help us reach "deeper truth." In Models and Metaphors: Studies in Language and Philosophy (1966) Black studies the relationships among language, logic and causation. He maintains that we use models, like metaphors, to explain concepts when gaps appear in normal language which we usually use to describe our ideas. The model becomes a "powerful tool for insight [and] ... has the power to bring cognitive and emotional domains into relationship with one another by using language appropriate to one as a lens for seeing the other" (p. 241). Black's image may be somewhat used but his point is well taken: when we describe an event, process, or concept in terms of the relationship of parts, new ideas and implications often arise from the very act of looking at the parts from various perspectives. Models allow us to do this because they are, by nature, a grealty simplified rendering of a complex event or process. When we choose the variables in any situation which we consider to be essential, somehow a clearer picture is drawn of that situation because we can select, emphasize, and reorganize dependent elements as we choose. Eventually, Black says, a

model becomes a "conceptual archetype," the "ultimate frame of reference by which a thinker describes ideas by means of analogical extension to some domain to which those ideas do not apply" (p. 250).

Whichever point of view about the conceptual basis for models appeals to us personally, however, there are some basic points about the overall value of models on which most writers agree: first, models are "symbolic representations of various aspects of a complex event or situation...and should include all variables which the model builder considers important" (Lippitt, 1973); and secondly, that models assist in problem-solving because they enhance one's ability to perceive and manipulate the essential elements of a situation, process or event whose complexity would otherwise preclude study of those elements. Ashby, in fact, reminds us "...to remember Brennemann's demonstration that there is a limit to the rate at which matter can transmit or process information and models replace and simplify systems whose study would transgress Brennemann's limit" (pp. 99-100).

In 1980, Denver Auraria Community College (DACC), developed a process which allowed the development of an instructional support division model, identified those instructional and organizational elements which we considered most important, wrote goals and objectives for each element within the model and thereby provided ourselves with a working framework within which we still function. The model has been updated and revised somewhat over the past three and a half years but it has served us very well as a focal point and guide. Each year a divisional planning and budget committee review the model and has recommended slight changes in direction but just as often the model review seems to reinforce our sense of direction and progress.

Before we organized into a division structure, instructional support services were scattered throughout the College. The Learning Development

Center, which provides general language and math skill tutoring was understaffed, poorly organized, and had little sense of mission other than to help walk-in students with whatever problems they were experiencing. A full-time coordinator supervised four full-time and approximately 10-15 part time faculty. Three of the full-time faculty had masters degrees in reading and the fourth a masters in instructional leadership. There was little in the way of program evaluation because a sense of mission had never been defined and, therefore, the relationship of the Center to the rest of the College remained foggy. As an example, courses in remedial English, mathematics, and reading were scattered among other divisions and the faculty teaching those courses were organizationally segregated from LDC faculty although the curriculum content differed little among the locations.

Tutoring support for students in vocational programs was provided by a federally-funded Supplemental Services program whose tutoring activities further overlapped those of the LDC. There was little coordination between the two on staffing, tutor schedules, or tutor training sessions even though the heads of both progrms reported to the same Dean and occupied contiguous offices.

A language lab was operated separately by the humanities division, a nursing tutoring lab by the human services division, and a small math skills lab tutored students enrolled in higher math classes. These were also staffed and scheduled independently with little or no coordination among program leaders.

Funding for the Learning Development Center had been provided by the State, on an inputed FTE formula, since the creation of the College. Funding for other tutoring activities, however, was entirely supported by the College at the expense of other instructional programs.

These scattered, uncoordinated instrutional support efforts provided a level of service which was probably adequate for assisting students with well-defined problems on a walk-in basis. They lacked, however, the ability to make inciteful diagnosis and to plan remedial programs for students with academic deficiencies which were not easily recognizable. The resulting lack of continuity for the student meant that educational goals were seldom set and that progress was noted only sporadically.

Since January, 1981 Developmental Studies has been funded and staffed as an instructional division and enjoys equal status with other divisions at the College. Annualized FTE has grown from 100 to 360. Six new programs have been started which now more than adequately support themselves, all tutoring funding and facilities have been grouped together and share staff development activities, the Learning Development Center has been reorganized to provide direct support for developmental curricula, and a basic skills assessment program has been implemented and is required of all new students. These additions and modifications were made possible in large part because our original division model described the essential programs and services which the division should would have and also described how future change would take place so as to minimally inconvenience existing programs; to date, the model has served us well.

We began by formulating what Ashby called the "generating question." Actually we formulated many such questions in an attempt to identify which then-current elements at the College seemed likely to fit into our concept of what the new division would be designed to do. We readily mixed structural and process kinds of elements and eventually arrived at a concept of the new division which oriented all of its elements toward instruction or as direct support for instructional components. We grouped together all existing reme-

dial/developmental courses in language, math and science skill areas; correlated a basic skills assessment for new students to those curricula; divided the role of the LDC into basic skill tutoring and other types of tutorial support; developed adjunct classes which incorporate basic skill strategies into content courses; described the program evaluation process which allows for change and adaptation; and provided for faculty assistance efforts in the forms of staff development seminars and workshops, text and material readability scans, and in-class presentations for students on skill topics. We then listed, in no particular order of importance, the types of tasks for which the new division would be responsible in each of the categories above and wrote narrative descriptions of the relationship among the tasks. From these descriptions we finally extracted an isomorphic representation of the Developmental Studies Division, its current and future staffing levels, and, broadly stated, its goals and objectives.

Since our reorganization into a college division the model has greatly assisted in bringing together those scattered tutorial services, streamlined staff development efforts, enhanced in-services for content faculty, stretched resources in general, and gave each of the developmental programs the educational and funding status of belonging to a unit recognized and funded equally with other instructional divisions. Increased coordination among classrooms and labs has increased tutoring FTE 300% because the labs are no longer isolated from the mainstream of the curriculum but are an integral part of instruction. The only real disadvantage has been that even doubling the number of faculty has not kept up with increased student FTE so that we are now the most seriously understaffed division at the College. Luckily, we have recruited and maintained an excellent part-time cadre of faculty who are, in most cases, as well qualified as regular staff.

We have even found, over the past two years, that Max Brach's perception about the inherent power of models is true. The Developmental Studies model has helped us reach a "deeper truth" at least in the sense that we can make easily more divisional elements into new in arrangments in order to meet the changing needs of students or programs and still not destroy the integrity of the division itself. Without the ability to practice such arrangments by manipulating the model, change would be slower and less effective.

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